Ira P. Gunn, Nurse Anesthetist: Writings and Wisdom from a Legendary Nursing Leader, edited by Jay Horowitz, BSN, CRNA, ARNP; Maura S. McAuliffe, PhD, CRNA, FAAN; Rita M. Rupp, MA. 768 pages, with DVD. $59.50. Published by the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-9829912-3-7

Like most CRNAs, I never had the opportunity to personally meet Ira Gunn. However, the results of her lifelong mission, which was to advocate for the healthcare rights of all people, influence each of us on a daily basis. The newly released book, Ira P. Gunn, Nurse Anesthetist: Writings and Wisdom from a Legendary Nursing Leader, chronicles the life of this inspirational woman. The editors thoroughly highlight many of Ms Gunn’s achievements, which occurred during her 60 year career as a nurse. Many leaders excel in one or two aspects within their profession but not Ira. Her areas of interest were numerous and included, “researcher, educator, historian, legislative and regulatory strategist, advanced practice legal expert, political activist, orator and writer.”

Ira was born in central Texas and both of her parents were school teachers. She deeply believed in the importance of education. Ira completed college with a degree in chemistry. She also enrolled in courses necessary for entrance into medical school but due to the limited number of positions for women to become physicians in 1946, she decided to pursue a career in nursing. Soon after graduation, Ira joined the Army Nurse Corps (ANC). She served honorably in the United States, Korea, and Germany and created the first graduate nurse anesthesia program as a collaborative between Tripler Army Medical Center and the University of Hawaii. Ira retired from the ANC in 1973 as a lieutenant colonel after receiving the Legion of Merit Award in recognition for her efforts to expand the role and training for Army nurses in anesthesia.

To say that Ira Gunn was a prolific orator and writer is an understatement. The main body of the book is a compendium of her writings and opinions on a variety of topics including a comprehensive history of nurse anesthesia; educational preparation, credentialing and workforce development; legal, legislative and regulatory challenges; healthcare systems; clinical practice; military nursing in war and peacetime; research; and thoughts about the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists. Ira’s knowledge related to each of these issues was immense and the descriptions by which the authors portray her verbal and written opinions suggest an unparalleled clarity of thought and decisive action. I was fascinated by the question and answer format that composed certain chapters of different round table discussions from CRNA Forum on topics such as the Role of the Profession, Quality Assurance, and others. Included is a DVD of her memorial service that highlights testimonials from many of the current leaders of the nurse anesthesia profession and descriptions of how Ira touched their lives and positively influenced their careers.

After reading this book, it is obvious that Ira Gunn was a visionary and inspirational leader. Her opinions about the importance of evidence based research and the most thorough educational preparation to support a full scope of practice for CRNAs have currently been realized and remain present and vital topics of conversation. As a result, the American Academy of Nursing named Ira the first CRNA to be inducted as a Fellow and later named her a Living Legend in Nursing. Henry Adams said, “A teacher affects eternity, he or she never knows where their influence stops.” The positive impact that Ira P. Gunn had on the nurse anesthesia profession will be timeless.

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